

# Principles in Giving

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Well, grab your Bibles and I want you to go to 2 Corinthians 8 this morning. 2 Corinthians 8. I'll just deal with the text as I outline what I'm gonna give you. This is gonna be a different kind of sermon from me. Instead of unpacking all that's here, I want to glean through two chapters that is the most extensive teaching on giving in the entire Bible. I didn't research that but I'm quite certain that's true. Um, as Paul is working with the local church at Corinth to prepare them to give this offering, this gift collectively as a local church to be taken to the suffering local church in Jerusalem and he outlines here a lot of general principles about giving. Now I won't uncover all of them and there's so much more that could be said, I guess, but I've gleaned many of them.

Alright, I've called this "Principles in Giving." Principles in giving. Now sometimes the principle relates to you, the individual giver, sometimes it relates to the local church collectively that as we get together like when we do all of our giving, we give together for the local operating budget, we give together for the Christmas love offering, we give together for our faith commitment for world missions, and that's the New Testament pattern. Matter of fact, it's, it's hard to really trace any giving in the New Testament other than giving to and through your local church and that's what's happening here. So let's look at some principles in giving.

Principle 1. The principle of being well-centered in your giving. The principle of being well-centered. If you will, look at chapter 8, verse 1. 2 Corinthians 8:1. He writes to them,

1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

First of all, he says, "Now, brethren." Well, who are the brethren? It's the local church at Corinth. It's not just a, a splash of address to brethren everywhere, it's to the local church at Corinth. Now it's inspired Scripture so it's a word to the local church in Muscle Shoals also.

And then he says, "I, I want to talk to you about the giving in the, the way the Macedonian churches," he uses plural there, the local churches, "gave or, or are planning to give in this very same offering." Uh, even if you go over to chapter 9, he says to them,

"I, I want to exhort you about your," and here's the exact praise, "your, your previously promised bountiful gift." Well, whose previously promised bountiful gift? A businessman in the church there? No, he means the whole local church. "Together corporately you're gonna give and you're gonna take this one big gift offering and, and use it to help the poor saints in Jerusalem." Here's what I'm saying to you: the New Testament is centered on local churches and you can't find any example, especially any pattern of giving for the Lord's work outside of giving to and through your local church. Um, so I would challenge you and exhort you, I'm certainly not suggesting that giving to other ministry causes are necessarily evil or wrong but they might be unwise and they possibly could be evil if they begin, begin to replace your devotion to the church God has added you to. I like to use the metaphor of saying when you were converted and God added you. Now notice God converts you and God adds you, you didn't do it. God saved you. God made you part of his ekklesia, that's the word that we translate "church," his called-out ones. He called you out of the world into this new family and that's to be the center of your giving and support. Other things are, are secondary, or might be the overflow of that centered giving.

So let's be mindful and let's remind ourselves afresh that we want to be well-centered, local church centered in our giving and supporting of God's work. Now if, if we get to heaven and Jesus says, "Why didn't you give to this, this and this? You just primarily gave to your local church." You can say, "Brother Jeff." And I'll take it and I'll say, "Lord, Your word is explicitly clear on that." I, I, I will vouch for you at the judgment bar of God if I've missed something. And by the way, and, and, and I, and I support other ministries. I, I've done that, not regularly but I've done that throughout my life and we give some out of our mission's budget to things like Gideon's, so I'm not saying they're evil but those things come and go. Those things often serve a purpose for a season and are no longer needed, but the local church will be here until Jesus returns and then in heaven we'll all be united together as one great church of the Lord Jesus Christ. So the principle, principle of being well-centered in the local church.

2. The principle of joyous giving. Joyous giving. This just comes out right at the beginning of Paul talking about this to the churches at Corinth. Uh, we look at chapter 8 of 2 Corinthians and we're going 1 through 5 here.

1 Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

He's just, "Man, God's grace has worked in their hearts." Verse 2,

2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.

So they're under great affliction but at the same time they have an abundance of joy. They have deep poverty but at the same time they overflowed with great liberality in their gift. Verse 3,

3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

Now two key things here. Verse 1, he said the grace of God was working in the local churches of Macedonia. Now that's a key factor. Uh, pastors need to learn to preach Christ, preach the Gospel so that the grace of God tenders the hearts of the church members and the grace of God brings in that sweet Gospel humility and then giving takes care of itself. And then in verse 5 he says, another key aspect, "they first gave themselves to the Lord," and then he says, "and to the will of God in supporting us." That's the way every pastor should want their people to give. It's not about coercion and it's not about arm-twisting and it's not about guilt trips. It's about so helping you to see Christ that it's your joy to support Christ and his work through his churches.

Joyous giving. The Macedonians were in a great ordeal of affliction. They were suffering deep poverty personally but actually begged Paul, "Can we give a gift to help the saints at Jerusalem also?" Wow, what a picture. But what's the point? It's the grace of God that brings you to a place of joy in materially, financially supporting God's work. You first give yourself to the Lord. "Lord, I give myself over to You, learning afresh and learning more deeply that You are my supply, You are my treasure, You are my contentment, You are my joy, You are my hope so now I'm not so attached to stuff anymore."

Joyous giving. It's, it's been my exhortation to you for, would it be true to say decades now, when we come to an offering like our Christmas love offering for our debt retirement in four weeks, I have told you, I want to charge you to give a generous offering but only give what you can give with joy. Don't you go around here grumbling about me. "I had to give that because Brother Jeff..." Keep it. Just keep it. Lay that savings account book by your bedstead and look at it every night and say, "That's my joy." If Christ is not your joy, if you can't give a generous gift with joy, then don't give it. Nobody's gonna know but God.

Joyous giving. So seek the Lord and give to the Lord his work, his way, for his glory, with joy in your hearts. Grace brought this joy in the hearts of the Macedonians, Paul said to the Corinthians, and they first had given themselves to the Lord, then they jumped to supporting the offering Paul wanted to raise which was the will of God, Paul says. Alright, we talked about the principle of being well-centered, it's local church giving; we talked about the principle of joyous giving; now another principle that comes out is integrity. Integrity in our giving. Notice this in verses 7 through 11. In verse 7 he says,

7 But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the love we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also.

He said, "You're, you're growing in Christ in all areas but make sure you're growing in Christ in your giving also." That's what he's saying. Verse 8,

8 I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love...

Give so that you prove you really love Christ and you really love the brethren. Verse 9,

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

Uh, let's see. I'm going to, um, verse 11. Verse 10,

10 I give my opinion in this matter, for this is to your advantage, who were the first to begin a year ago not only to do this, but also to desire to do it.

Now that's a key phrase. He said, "A year ago, you, you voluntarily said, 'We desire to get in on collecting this money to help the local church in Jerusalem.'" But notice what Paul says in verse 11,

11 But now finish doing it also, so that just as there was the readiness to desire it, so there may be also the completion of it by your ability.

"You've made it very clear, local church at Corinth, that you wanted to, to, to raise a special offering, a special love gift for the suffering local church in Jerusalem, now let's go ahead and get it done, let's have integrity about it. You know, you don't have any integrity if you just talk about it but you don't follow through. You desired to give it, now follow through with it. Be true to your word. Don't be a blow-off."

I can't tell you the times in 40 years of ministry and I'm not talking about anybody in our church, but I have had men contact me. It happened actually in South Africa one time, at one time our broadcast was all over the, the whole area of the southern part of the continent of Africa and this man was exceedingly wealthy and he had, asked to have a meal with me while we were over there doing some mission work, and I had this meal with this man and he began to tell me how wealthy he was and how he wanted to support our work, he believed in what we were about, he was impressed with it and I'm telling you, I just got so excited. You know what? I came home and told you about it. Do some of y'all remember that? I told you about this guy. You know how much he's given so far? Goose egg. Nothing. He's given nothing to missions. By the way, I've soon learned just to smile and say, "God bless you and thank you," and go on. And that's happened more than once. That's not having any integrity. Paul tells the local church at Corinth, "You've made quite a noise about what you're gonna do for the Lord, now make sure you follow through it and actually give it. Have integrity in your pledge and in your commitment."

Now of course, these are the verses we get our faith promise offering from but the principles of giving apply to more than just the faith promise, it involves, they, they apply to all the aspects of giving to the Lord's work. I mean think about it. We don't want to be like Ananias and Sapphira. What was their problem? Their problem was integrity. They said before the church, "We're gonna give all this wealth to support the church's work." They didn't, there was no word in the Scripture or from Peter's mouth or any of the leaders that they had to do that. They, like the others, voluntarily said, "We're gonna give everything we have and support the work of the church." It was a unique special time in church history. This is not the pattern for all time. It was in the early chapters of Acts where the narrative plays out, of course, and it's certainly not a teaching on Socialism or Communism. That's not what it's teaching. It was just a unique time and people were voluntarily under the leadership of God giving these enormous gifts and Ananias and Sapphira lied and say, "Like the others, we're giving all we've got," but they didn't do it. They didn't have integrity. They kept back some of it and God killed both of them. Now as far as I know, God's not practicing killing in the Sunday morning worship service these days but it does tell you God says, "I take seriously when you tell Me you're putting Me first and then you make a public noise about it and you don't honor Me and follow through."

Well, the principle of integrity. Paul tells the Corinthians, "You've talked about this gift, now make sure you come through." Now number 4: the principle of initiative. Now we see this in a couple of places. Let's go back up to verse 4. He talks about the Macedonia churches in verse 4, "begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in this." They were taking the initiative and now in verse 12, he says, "For if the readiness is present," in other words, if you're, if you're, if you're ready to take the initiative. That's what that phrase means. And here's my point here: somebody's got to lead. Somebody's gotta get out front. I have seen that through the years.

You know, it's interesting, I've seen this through the years that some Christians need permission to give a generous gift to the Lord. They really kinda want to in their heart and their heart's stirred about it, but they kinda need somebody else to say, "Hey, I'm gonna give those, that kind of gift," and then they say, "Hey, I will too." I'm not talking about an exact amount, I'm just talking about the principle of somebody getting out there and taking the initiative. We have a great example of this in, uh, in, in King David in the Old Testament.

Let me back up for just a moment before we get to that. Um, it's interesting, when he, when Paul uses the churches of Macedonia and their example as a pattern to encourage the church at Corinth, and when, when he talks about the churches at Macedonia, he doesn't say, "The local church at Macedonia said, 'Hey, whatta the guys over in Achaia doing this year?' And, 'Hey, what's the church at Corinth doing and that'll give us a guide for what we're gonna do.'" The Macedonians didn't say that, they said, "We wanna give generously. We don't care what anybody else is doing." You know what they were doing? They were taking the initiative. Now I'm not saying it's always wrong. Maybe some guys get together and say let's each do so much. I'm not saying that's wrong, I just don't find

any pattern in Scripture encouraging that. In Scripture, you just find people getting with God and going for it, taking the initiative.

Now to King David. 1 Chronicles 29:2 and 3. David is raising money to build the temple and David says in 1 Chronicles 29:2, "Now with all my ability I have provided for the house of my God the gold for the things of gold, the silver for the things of silver, the bronze for the things of bronze, the iron for the things of iron, wood for the things of wood, onyx stones and inlaid stones, stones of antimony and stones of various colors, and all kinds of precious stones and alabaster in abundance." David said, "I'm doing a bunch." Then we get to verse 3. He says, "Moreover, in my delight in the house of my God," that's back to joy again, "the treasure I have." Now he says, "Now I'm getting out of the state's money now. This is my personal wealth. The treasure I have of gold and silver, I give to the house of my God, over and above all that I have already provided for the holy temple." He said, "I've brought a lot out of the state's treasury, an enormous amount, and in addition to that I'm bringing a whole lot of my personal wealth out. I want this temple built." And then what happened? Verse 6 of 1 Chronicles 9:6, "Then the rulers of the fathers' households, and the princes of the tribes of Israel, and the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, with the overseers over the king's work, offered willingly." Then the rest of the men say, "Hey, man, we'll do it too." But somebody had to take the initiative, somebody had to lead, somebody had to say, "I believe in this. Let's get this done."

I don't know how that's supposed to work. I'm not charging you that next Sunday in your small group everybody's supposed to talk about what they're gonna give. Matter of fact, I'd ask you not to do that because God may tell you more between now and then. But what I am saying, there is a sense in which you can communicate an excitement, an enthusiasm, and a purpose to do all you can for God's work. That's what I'm talking about.

Well, the principle of initiative. Now let's go to the next one, number 5: the principle of equality. Now this is probably rather unique to the context here but it does have some application for us. Look at verses 13 through 15.

13 For this is not for the ease of others and for your affliction, but by way of equality-- 14 at this present time your abundance being a supply for their need, so that their abundance also may become a supply for your need, that there may be equality; [verse] 15 and it is written, "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack"

Here's what he's saying. He's saying, "Now church at Corinth, all the church at Corinth, I'm not asking you to give this generous gift that you've already talked about you want to give, I'm not asking you to give this so that you can find yourselves with barely enough to live on and the local church at Jerusalem gets all this money and they live in luxury and ease." He said, "That's not what I'm talking about. You see, what I'm talking about is you Corinthians in the local church at Corinth, you have wealth relative to many of the

other churches and literally our brothers and sisters in the local church at Jerusalem are about to starve to death." I mean, when, when we talk about need in the ancient world, we're not talking about what these modern liberals talk about. We're talking about literally, "We don't know what we're gonna eat in the morning. We're just scratching to barely make, have an existence." So he says, "This will kind of equal things out."

Again, this is not a pattern the Bible is teaching for all time but in this case it's encouraged, and I think there is an aspect of equality that, uh, connects more to us because I know of no church in America or no congregation where the people literally, a good percentage of them don't know how they're gonna eat tomorrow. Uh, one of the things that fascinates me, I, I heard during the, uh, the COVID pandemic that all of these school systems were still providing so that parents could pull up and get box breakfasts and box lunches for their children every day. Now I want to say, "Now wait a minute, you mean to tell me these moms and dads drive up in their car they're paying for yet don't have enough money to feed their babies breakfast and lunch?" No, here's the thing, here's what they're saying, "If you'll pay for it, we won't pay for it." That's what they're saying. Now there may be some that have that kind of need but I think it's ridiculous that we've come to that level. I'm gonna tell you, we don't have a child poverty problem in America, we've got a parenting deficiency problem in America. My mom would have walked 10 miles to work to feed her children. Period.

So what I'm saying, I didn't mean to get off on that horse so heavy, okay? But what I'm saying is we don't have a poverty issue in our country like the ancient world. The, the church at Jerusalem in this day was really suffering a lack of a roof over their head, lack of clothes on their back, a lack of food on their table literally, and so he's saying to the Corinthians, "This will equal things out if y'all will give them a generous gift." Now we may have some brothers and sisters around the world, matter of fact, we have missionaries and church plants all over the globe and, and, and Steve is very faithful when something pops up and there's a legitimate need, we take care of it. We send money immediately and we buy motorcycles for Juan to ride up there to the Pucaru people in Peru, whatever it is. And I appreciate your faithfulness through the years so that we can make sure the local churches we're connected with when they suffer, we're there for them equally things out, if you will.

Well, one of the things that this is teaching against is some of the ancient practices of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, where they would, they would go around and, and pressure their people to give generously and say things like, "You'd better give a generous gift so that you can purchase your deceased mother out of purgatory." That's awful. Can you imagine a person not knowing anything but what the Church taught with the terror in their heart thinking, "My deceased mother is suffering in the fires of purgatory. I gotta give more money." And these very poor people were giving everything they had to the Church while the pope in the Church hierarchy lived in austere luxury in the Vatican in Rome. That's what Paul is saying, "That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about you Corinthians giving so that the Jerusalem church can live in luxury and you suffer. I'm talking about this equals things out."

Equality in giving and maybe equality in giving also includes the idea that those of us who've been blessed more materially outta give more to God's work, and maybe a single mom out here that's got two or three babies and she may give \$100 and that's a great gift for her, some of you men could give \$100,000 and it wouldn't affect you at all. There's mommas in here that give \$200-300 and they would struggle with buying their babies a Christmas present or two but some of you guys will give \$200-300,000 and you wouldn't miss anything for Christmas. Equality. I'm not telling you what to do, I'm telling you those are biblical principles to consider.

6. The principle of credibility. Credibility. We begin in verse 16 as Paul's talking to the church at Corinth about getting this offering together, he says and it's going to be a very credible system that you can trust. Verse 16, 2 Corinthians 8,

16 But thanks be to God who puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, he has gone to you of his own accord.

He's saying, "Titus, my associate, is a man of high credibility and reputation and he has volunteered to help head up this offering project, this giving project." Verse 18, in addition to that,

18 We have sent along with him the brother whose fame in the things of the gospel has spread through all the churches;

He said, "In addition to Titus, another man's gonna be there for good accountability and he's a, he's a brother that's got great fame and a great reputation in all the local churches. Verse 19,

19 and not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, 20 taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; 21 for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. [So also,] 22 We have sent them our brother [now this is a third leader from Paul going to the church at Corinth to oversee this offering, so] We have sent them our brother, whom we have often tested and found diligent in many things, but now even more diligent because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker among you; as for our brethren, they are messengers of the churches, a glory to Christ. 24 Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

Here's what Paul's saying, "We have three of the most reputable men you can find overseeing the receiving of this offering, the transporting of this offering, and the distributing of the offering when it gets to the local church of Jerusalem. There's



credibility here in our ministry. You can trust and give a generous gift." And all I can say to you for application to us is I've been with you 40 years, we've proven credibility in this area. Matter of fact, one of the ways we're credible is I know almost nothing about our money. I honestly do not know who takes it up, I honestly don't know where they take it, I honestly don't know who counts the money. I kinda have an idea of one or two but I don't know who the team is anymore and actually the staff and the, our, our, our Brother Phil B. who is, who is our accountant and administrator now and does that for us, Bill Newman still helps with that some. Bill used to do it. These guys have degrees in accounting, they've been with us a long long long time and I'm just thankful that I don't have to have my nose in any of it. I don't need my nose in any of it.

Here's what I'm saying: there's a thorough accountable system where two or three men always are together when the money is dealt with. We have striven to be very credible in our Gospel ministry. I don't know of a hint of question about the integrity of our dealing of finances here at Grace Life Church. Matter of fact, I don't think he would mind me mentioning but Frank Spires, who has an accounting office over in Florence, used to be the, the office that we used to overview our books. I think he did it annually and he told me some time ago, "I was always impressed with the way your church accounted for everything they took in and everything they spent." His point was a lot of churches don't do it as well.

So we want to be very credible and one of the ways we also try to be credible is we have a thorough biblical base for every priority of ministry at Grace Life Church. We don't just respond to need or request, we try to go by biblical truth. That's why preaching the word in small groups, for example, gets the bulk of our ministry monies because in Scripture that's the bulk of the emphasis. So there's the principle of credibility in a work and that's why I, I would say also that giving to and through the local church is so encouraged in the New Testament because you know those people, you know their character, you watch their lives. They're not off there yea under somewhere and you really don't know who their board is or what kind of character those men have.

Alright, next, number 7: the principle of inspiration. We've kinda touched on this but I want to hit on it again under the word inspiration. We see this in 8:24 down to chapter 9, verse 2.

24 Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

Now notice this, openly before the churches. What he's saying, "Church at Corinth, now you be an inspiration to others. Show them the proof of your love for Christ and the reason why we talk about how big of a gift you're gonna give." I have, I just kinda have to tongue-in-cheek think about how Paul's working this offering. Paul's basically saying, "I bragged about you everywhere, now don't embarrass me. I've bragged about how much you're gonna give to help the suffering saints in Jerusalem, now don't, don't, don't, don't embarrass me in this." Then he says,

1 For it is superfluous [in other words, there's no real reason to have] to write to you about this ministry to the saints; 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has stirred up most of them.

Now they haven't given the offering yet, they're getting ready to give it, but he said, "The way you've talked about, you've been zealous about you're gonna give this offering, you're inspiring others to give." Can I say to you, child of God at Grace Life Church of the Shoals, the way your attitude is about your tithes and offerings and your Christmas love offering is either a discouragement or an inspiration to your brothers and sisters around you, and I would charge you don't be a discouragement. Don't express a stingy spirit. There is no such thing as a spiritual church with a stingy spirit. Be an inspiration. Let, let others see what you do and I'm not saying you're supposed to just tell that specific amount, but let them see your heart, your attitude and your approach and it inspire them to seek the Lord and seek to do something generous for the Lord's sake. Folks, this is just plain old Bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter.

To give you an example of how God's allowed us as a church family to be an inspiration, there's a couple of churches that we have mentored in recent years and, and one of the main areas was to revamp the way they approached missions and this is no exaggeration, in the last couple of years together they are giving \$200,000 more to missions than they were before we began to mentor them. They were inspired by your model and actually though our faith commitment, what was it, \$450 or so thousand this year, Brother Steve? Actually if you add up what you cover through our regular budget that really goes to missions too, it's probably close to \$600,000 a year that you give to missions. Now I'm not saying we get any credit in heaven or we need to, uh, hold our heads high up in any pride, of course not. I just think we're barely normal, it's just that most churches are very sub-normal.

But you can inspire others. A man called me some years ago, again when we had changed our missions approach, I'm not talking about missions giving, we're talking about our Christmas offering, but this illustrates the truth of inspiration that Paul talked to the Corinthians about. He called me from Atlanta and he heads up a ministry there and he said, "Do you know your church is the shot heard around the world?" And I thought, "What in the world are you talking about?" He said, "Everybody's talking about the way your church does missions." It's inspiring others. And you may remember that the President of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention brought 60+ leaders literally from around the world to our church for a year some years ago so that they could learn more about how we do missions and they began to implement that across the Southern Baptist Convention. Of course, we're not connected to them any longer but we were an inspiration. It was a very large megachurch pastor in Atlanta who was approached about the way his church does missions and he told his church, and I know this for a fact, "If you want to know how to do missions, you need to go to Grace Life Church of the Shoals. They do the best job." Now that's not, again, to pat us on the back, that's just to say God has ordained just like Paul is telling the Corinthians, that you can do it right and you can be an inspiration to others. "Achaia," Paul said, "is on board

because they've heard about you. The Macedonians are waiting to see what you're gonna do. Are you gonna inspire them?" The principle of inspiration.

Alright, the principle of accountability. Verse 3 of chapter 9. Accountability. "But," there's that glorious conjunctive word again. It connects onto everything Paul said so far. Now remind yourself of what he said so far. "We've told everybody, we've boasted about you to everybody, you've told everybody, we've made a big noise about this. You're gonna give a great offering. It's, it's everywhere, everybody's thinking about it, everybody's watching, everybody's anticipating what you're gonna do. We know it's not gonna, we, it's superfluous for me to even have to mention it to you again. We know it's gonna be great. We're just confident about it. But..." That's the conjunction here. "But I have sent the brethren," in other words, I want to make sure, "I have sent the brethren." Why are y'all so uptight? You're not smiling or laughing or nothing. This is all fun. This is good stuff. It's Bible. Paul says, "But is it not so praised, just so practical.

3 But [Paul says] I have sent the brethren, in order that our boasting about you may not be made empty in this case, so that, as I was saying, you may be prepared;

"I know you're gonna do it. You've talked about it, we've talked about it. I mean, all the churches around the known world, they're all talking about it. I know it's gonna come through. I don't even have to say it, but I'm sending three of my best men down there to Corinth to get you ready to make sure you turn it in, to make sure it's everything we hoped it ought to be." I get so tickled about these people that say, "All he talks about is money." You could say that about the Apostle Paul. If you really study Paul's letters, he talks about it all the time. Paul says, "I want some guys there to kinda hold you accountable to come through on this thing."

You know, we may be weak here. I, I don't look at people's giving. Now I have looked at the staff's giving and if I have to look at the staff members' giving to find out if he's tithing or not, he doesn't need to be on my staff. I have dismissed people for that. Now look, there may be a struggle here or there, you might miss a month or two here and there, I'm talking about if a person as a pattern is not gonna give tithes and offerings and he's gonna collect a salary from this church, he does not need to be on this staff. Now you may not like that, so I don't care. It's right. Now again, if, look, if a brother's having a problem, we're gonna help him, amen? But I'm talking about a, a willful pattern where he, he don't have a real excuse.

So that's the only real accountability I know of unless you guys out there are holding each other accountable. I'm not saying you're supposed to but there is something in the Bible about this, an accountability principle. Maybe it'd be not more than just saying to a brother that you know you're not gonna offend them, you know, you gotta be careful who you challenge, okay, and just say, "Brother, are you really praying about this? I'm gonna really pray about this. Brother, are you really gonna try to do something special? I'm really gonna try to do something special." There's, there's ways to be accountable one to

another, in a sense. Now to be careful there, some people are more mature than others. The principle of accountability.

9. The principle of shame. Wow, that's in here too. The principle of shame. Look at verse 4, "otherwise," in other words, if you don't come through with the kind of offering everybody thinks you're going to and you've said you're going to and we've told everybody you're going to,

4 otherwise if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we--not to speak of you--will be put to shame by this confidence.

"It's gonna just be shameful. And we've talked about this great offering and you folks in Corinth," and haven't researched this but they're likely one of the more wealthy churches of all the churches Paul oversaw, "and you don't come through in a big way on this, it's going to be embarrassing. You're gonna be ashamed and I'm gonna be ashamed." And I would challenge you as Grace Life Church of the Shoals with our history of giving and we have a good history of giving, matter of fact, when you take the way we give to guest evangelists and the way we give to missions and the offerings we've raised through the years, we have quite a reputation of being a joyous, generous, faithful people when it comes to giving. I would say it's true. If we come up to the Christmas love offering and we only get a small percent of that in, it would be a shame. It, it would be like, "Well, wait a minute, people have talked about how y'all love the Lord, what in the world happened?" I can guarantee you, if that offering doesn't come through and I don't know how much it's supposed to be, I just don't know, but if it was obviously very weak, there would be pastors who would call me – now are you listening – and they'd say, "Brother Jeff, what happened? That's, that's not like y'all." There'd be shame in that and Paul says, "We don't want that to happen." The principle of shame.

10. The principle of preparation. Uh, verse 5 in the text,

5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren [that's those three key leaders I'm sending to you] that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand [here's Paul laying it on them again] your previously promised bountiful gift [wow, he just lathers it up on them], so that the same would be ready as a bountiful gift and not affected by covetousness.

I think what Paul's saying is, "I believe you were genuine when you previously promised you're gonna give this big gift," but Paul said, "I know something else, there's an old wicked, flesh, sin disease called covetousness that can get in there and it can knock a hole in an offering. So I've sent my best three guys," Paul says, "to work with you, to prepare you so that you get all the way to the finish line without covetousness." In this context it could be translated greediness, so that greediness doesn't knock a hole in this offering.

I'll never forget Dr. Gray Allison, the President of my graduate school, my seminary, and he talks about the school and how they started the school and, I mean, it was just nip and tuck. Every week they'd go to the mailbox and see if they could pay their professors

every week. It was just tough and they had a special need. This was years ago when \$50,000 really went a long way, and, um, he got a check in the mail for \$50,000 because he'd sent out a letter just saying, "Hey, we have needs. Will you just pray about it?" And this dear, I think she was a widow lady, she sent in \$50,000. He called her on the phone and said, "I just want to thank you for this gift," and he said, "Primarily I want to thank you that when God told you \$50,000 you didn't say, 'Oh, it's \$5,000.'" I'll never forget that, and I thought, you know, that's generally what can happen. The covetousness, the greediness kicks in and God kinda shows you an amount and then you pull it way back down, you keep the 5, you just knocked off a couple of those zeroes.

So Paul says, "I'm sending the brethren on ahead to guard so that that covetousness, that greediness doesn't kick in and hurt the offering." Covetousness is a, is an extremely contagious disease in a church. Let me give you an example of this. I'm not gonna name names but there's a good church that I work with and one of the areas we've worked with them in is their finances, and there's a dear brother, and I mean a dear brother in leadership at that church who somehow began to glory in how big the church's savings account was and he flew it like a banner, like one of these Trump banners these guys flies on their car. I mean, it was just, now he didn't literally do that but, I mean, it's just like when he would talk to the church leaders and the finance committee and the church elders, "We were able to da, da, da, and so in the bank, we've got so much in the bank." And they were just thrilled about how much was in the bank, or he was, and it just bled over to everybody and as we began to investigate why there were times when they were not generous, we thought these are good brothers, they love the Lord, and it turned out that one vocal, can I say, hoarder of money infected everybody else and covetousness kinda filled the thing up. And that's the way it can happen. You can have 10 men who want to be generous and one of them just throw out a little negative and the rest of them go, "Well, you know, I guess that, I guess that's kinda what we outta do too." Boy, we're hitting on some things this morning, aren't we?

Paul said, "I've got, I'm sending my three best guys to make sure that don't happen at Corinth. I don't want that to happen." I don't know how Titus' team handled it. Titus and the two brothers got there to Corinth, I don't know what they did. I, don't you wish you had a record of how they did all this?

What are we on? Number 11? The principle of reciprocity. Reciprocity, that means getting back, returning back. Look at verses 6 through 11. "Now I say this," now he's saying to the Corinthians, the gift hadn't come in yet but he's still, still getting them ready.

6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each man must do just as he has purposed in his heart [guys, here's the key again], not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; 9 as it is written, "He scattered abroad, He gave to the poor, His righteousness endures forever."

That's talking about eternal fruit. He said, "God's gonna bring it back in, during this temporal world to you, but He's also gonna give you great eternal rewards." Verse 10,

10 Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness;

What is he saying? As a general rule when you give to God and you give God's way for God's glory, and you do something special and you do it with joy in your heart, almost always God flows it back to you. But now listen to me, you'll never understand how it's gonna get back to you. You'll never figure it out. You see, that's what a lot of us would try to figure out ahead of time, "Now how's it gonna come back?" And God says, "Well, just keep it then. You just gotta trust Me. You just gotta trust Me."

Paul taught this again to the Philippians, Philippians 4:17, "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account." Paul says, "I've been wanting you to support my ministry." Now in this case Paul's talking about himself being supported. I told you he talks about it all the time. He does and he says, "If you'll support my work and having trying to help these churches, then God's gonna bring back blessings to you." He continues on in Philippians 4:19, "And my God," Paul says, "I know my God, He will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." Reciprocity. It's gonna come back to you. That's one of the principles of giving.

Jesus taught this. Luke 6:38, Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you." You could say given back to you. "They will pour into your lap," God will see to it that it comes through people but it's coming back to you, "good measure--pressed down, shaken together, running over." They would take their outer tunic and hold it up and they would buy certain amounts of grain and you would pay so much for a tunic-full, I guess, and they would put it in there and they'd keep shaking and pressing and shaking and pressing so they could get every tiny grain they possibly could get and then if the guy was really a good guy, he'd just keep pouring it on until it ran over. And Jesus said, "If you give generously and faithfully to My work, I'm gonna see to you that it comes back to you that way, running over." Well, "by your standard of measure," he says, "it will be measured to you in return." The principle of returning back to you.

Well, number 12: the principle of thanksgiving. Let's look at verse 12 of chapter 9.

12 For the ministry of this service [in other words, you giving to serve your brothers and sisters at the local church in Jerusalem] is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints [that's in Jerusalem], but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.

He says, "Do you not understand when you give this way, it just causes people everywhere to thank God and not just thank God for you but thank God for what he did in you to get you to the place where you'd give to his work like that." The principle of

thanksgiving. This morning as you and I meet, do you understand that many pastors, missionaries and church planters around the world are thanking God for you? You know why? Because we send them a check every month and a lot of them wonder, "How do they get all that money in?" And they just thank God that he's done a work of grace in our hearts so that we would faithfully and generously now for decades keep supporting those works around the world and God's getting many thanksgivings going up to him.

I was talking to Brother Barry King, the Executive Secretary of the Grace Baptist Partnership in England, and if we were not the first, we were right at the first church to support his church planting work there and God's blessed it. And he went through some tough, tough seasons. It was, I mean, tough. We're talking about eating soup for supper and going to bed and thankful you had it for a while and, but we kept giving I think you would say generously to the work there, and we got others who are connected to us supporting the work there. Barry and I were talking, I don't know, a few months ago on the phone and I remembered back to how hard it was and I just said and, and I didn't mean anything by it other than just the statement, I said, "Barry, I don't know who you made it." He chuckled and he said, "We both know how we made it. It's the way y'all gave to support us that got us through." What he was saying is, "And we're thankful to God for what happened through you to help the work here in England." It's the principle of thanksgiving. You cause many others to be thankful to God when you're faithful to God in your giving.

Then the principle of glorification closely akin but a different thing. Glorification, verse 13 of chapter 9.

13 Because of the proof given by this ministry, they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all,

He said, "The Macedonians, or rather the Corinthians and others who hear about it," I'm sorry, "the Jerusalem church and others who hear about it are gonna glorify God because they know this," if I can just say it from a, a historic Jewish perspective, "they know this, you dirty Gentile dogs wouldn't care for the things of God if Christ hadn't changed your heart. You wouldn't be generous like this to help us if God by his grace hadn't apprehended you and saved you and transformed you and so we just glorify God for the power of the gospel. Not for the money itself, we need it, thank you, but that God changed you and that caused you to give a great offering." You want to have a church, pastors, you want to have a church that's a generous church for decades like I've experienced? You've gotta get your people to the point where the great majority of them are really regenerate born again children of God, not just good Baptists but regenerate children of God. And they're praising God for it, he says. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also, and where your heart is, this isn't Bible but it's the same truth, where your heart is, there will your treasure be also and God has to change the heart to get us there.

There's a direct correlation between what you do with your money and God receiving more glory. Think about that. When our money helps advance the Gospel and plant churches, then those people receiving it praise God and glorify God for it. When your money just builds big corporations and lots of stuff and that's good and great, by the way, I'm not saying that's wrong but you need to make the end of your corporation, the end of your business, the end of your whatever that I want to see God get more glory. Are you listening to me? There will be an accounting at the judgment seat of Christ.

I have one more. Are you happy? I'm just kinda blown away by this. Doesn't the Bible just amaze you? It's just so practical. It's just so and Paul's so real. He's just down to earth, pragmatic here, practical about the whole thing. The, the principle of foundation. What I mean, what is the foundation stone that all other principles depend on? Here's the foundation stone. We've already literally hit on it but here's the foundation stone that everything else depends upon, verse 15,

15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

His point is, "You vile, wretched, whoremongering, fornicating, adultering, wicked, pagan Corinthians have been given Jesus. You've been given this indescribable gift, Jesus, and He's changed you." It's just indescribable. Paul says, "When I think about it for a moment, that I'm actually writing to a group of believers in Jesus Christ in vile, secular, pagan, idol-worshiping, sexually perverse and immoral Corinth." Matter of fact, in the ancient world, to be Corinthian meant to commit a perverse sex act. That's how prominent it was in this culture. Paul says, "It's just mind-boggling that you're dear, purified, being sanctified brothers in Christ, sisters in Christ, and that's why you're giving is what it is because Christ, this gift has come to you."

Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." The gift changed you guys. The gift forgave you. The gift saves you. But here's the point, here's the foundation stone: it all came from God. God sought you. God changed you and saved you. God then gave you the desire to give this gift to help the local church in Jerusalem. God gave you the wealth you have. He gave you the minds, the bodies, the brains to make it, to earn it, to gain it. But it came from him so it's all the gift of God seeking you, changing you, saving you, giving you the desire and giving you the wealth to give it. As he reminded the Corinthians back in his first letter, 1 Corinthians 4:7, "What do you have that you've not received?" Can anybody stand up and tell me what you have that you didn't receive? It all came from him. That's the foundation stone. When you get there, that I have this indescribable gift, the giving takes care of itself. It takes care of itself.

The Psalmist reminds us that our temporal life on this earth is like a mere breath. All of us today our, our whole pilgrimage on earth is this: [breathes in and out] gone, and with COVID it might be half a mere breath. Job said we came from the dust and we're going right back to it. Just ain't much to us without God. God makes us into something by giving us Christ and eternal life. And listen to me, listen to me, it's the indescribable gift – now listen to me – because no one can take Christ and eternal life away from you. No



one. Even the Socialist Democrats can't. No one. They're the big boogeyman these days, aren't they? By the way, they are boogeymen. I don't like them. I don't like Socialism. I don't like Communism. Private property ownership is taught thoroughly in the Bible. But even if my country goes to ruin, no one can take my Jesus and eternal life from me. So that helps me not want to hoard so much of it back, can maybe use a whole lot of it for God's work, that indescribable gift. That's the foundation stone.

Now here's what I'm gonna charge you to do as your pastor: you seek the Lord and you do what you want to do. How about that? I won't know. Now those folks on the accounting committee might know, so if you walk down the hallway after Christmas and you run into one of them and they go, "Huh." That might be what it's about. I don't know. But I don't, I don't know who those people are other than Phil B. and Phil won't do that. He's kind. So nobody's gonna know but you and Jesus. And I, can I just be, I'm and as your pastor, can I, I've been doing this a long time, if that Christmas love offering doesn't come close to paying off our debt but everyone gave with joy, I'm happy. I'm happy. But on the other hand, it's inconceivable that we all give with joy and we can't get that paid off. I know both are true.

But no matter what happens, nobody can take this gift, Jesus and eternal life, from me. Now I'm not asking you to leave and remember all 15 of these but God hit you with something along the way. Take that with you and let's walk more fully in the biblical principles of giving to the Lord's work.